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ABSTRACT

This study describes the actions taken by public institutions of higher education over the last several years to respond to severe financial pressures. It is based on the responses of 296 public colleges and universities to 24 questions included in the 1994 Campus Trends survey that were relevant to actions taken in expenditure control, new sources of revenue, reorganization, and selective decisions about academic programs. The study found that, over the last several years, most (two-thirds or more) public-sector institutions have tightened expenditure controls, taken steps to develop new sources of revenue, undergone administrative and academic restructuring, and made "hard" decisions about prioritizing and cutting specific academic programs. Differences in approach by institution type (research universities, doctorate-granting institutions, comprehensive universities and colleges, and community colleges) are also explored. The study documents a substantial level of activity among public colleges and universities to redirect their operations and programs. This, in turn, suggests that many institutional administrators have become convinced that serious changes are necessary and that their current financial problems are neither temporary nor limited in impact. (Contains 13 references.) (MDM)

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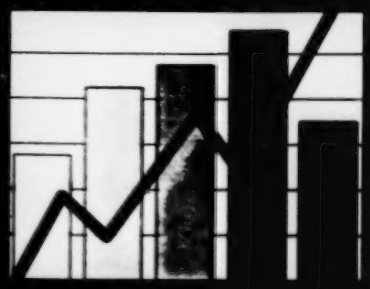

Research Briefs

Restructuring Initiatives in Public Higher Education: Institutional Response to Financial Constraints

ELAINE EL-KHAWAS

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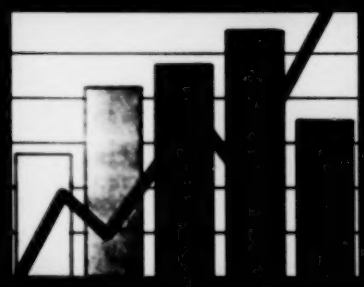

Research Briefs

Restructuring Initiatives in Public Higher Education: Institutional Response to Financial Constraints

ELAINE EL-KHAWAS

Public higher education in the United States is facing another era of severe financial constraints. Over the last five years, most public colleges, community colleges, and universities have suffered budget cuts, while enrollments have continued to rise. What has been their response? Have actions extended beyond short-term measures and, if so, what are the primary directions being taken?

This brief describes the actions taken by public institutions of higher education over the last few years to respond to severe financial pressures. Data are taken from the ACE study, *Campus Trends, 1994*, and are shown for four types of public-sector institutions: community colleges; comprehensive institutions; doctoral-granting universities; and research universities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Most public-sector institutions — two-thirds or more — have taken steps to redirect their operations and programs during the last few years.
- The most widespread action is to tighten expenditure controls through increased monitoring of expenses. Most public institutions also have efforts underway to develop new sources of revenue.
- Reorganization and restructuring are taking place, affecting both academic and administrative units at more than half of all public institutions of higher education.
- One-half of doctoral-granting and research universities and at least one-third of community colleges and comprehensive institutions have followed a multi-pronged strategy. This involves taking actions reflecting all four approaches: controlling expenditures; reorganizing; seeking new sources of revenue; and making changes in academic programs.
- There are distinctive differences by type of institution. Compared to other public institutions:
  - More community colleges are planning academic programs with business.
  - Fewer comprehensive institutions are deferring maintenance of their physical plant.
  - More doctoral-granting institutions have increased class size and made changes affecting student services.
  - More research universities are taking actions involving selective changes in academic programs.

Response to Financial Constraints: General Trends

For public institutions of higher education in the United States, the early 1990s have been a time of severe financial pressures. State appropriations, which provide core operating support, have been cut back dramatically, often for several consecutive years and with abrupt, mid-year recissions. These cutbacks were caused by the economic problems facing most states in the early 1990s. While there are recent signs of economic recovery, financial pressures are likely to continue to constrain state support of higher education. Financing for Medicaid,

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THE CAMPUS TRENDS STUDY

In the spring of 1994, ACE surveyed a sample of all colleges and universities in the United States. Senior administrators were asked to describe their institutions' current status as well as recent changes in circumstances. The study drew responses from 110 independent institutions and 296 public-sector institutions; the latter are the focus of this report. They include: 123 community colleges; 89 comprehensive institutions; 35 doctoral-granting universities; and 49 research universities. All data were statistically weighted so that results can be considered representative of all institutions in these categories.

Attention in this report is restricted to study findings that describe the ways in which public universities and colleges responded to widespread financial constraints affecting them over the last few years. The analysis reviews the extent to which public institutions indicated they had recent activity on any of 24 possible actions. These actions were selected from a longer list of about 50 possible actions because they were the actions most frequently mentioned. These 24 actions have been grouped into four general strategies for purposes of this analysis.

The actions described here are representative of the wide range of actions taken by universities and colleges, but the list does not describe the full range of actions and strategies being pursued. Further, these actions are best understood as early responses to harsh and often abrupt financial constraints. Some of these actions may be preliminary steps, setting the basis for different actions in the future.

For more information, see *Campus Trends, 1994*.

corrections, and primary and secondary education will remain a threat to adequate higher education funding (AASCU, 1994). An important additional factor is that, over the long term, college enrollment will continue to rise. Enrollment demand will increase further in the late 1990s, although enrollment restrictions and enrollment management plans at some public institutions could constrain actual growth.

In view of recent funding cuts and the prospect of continuing financial pressures, some long-standing premises of higher education financing are being called into question. How much support should be provided by states and how much should be provided by students and parents themselves? To what extent should other sources of financing offer support for basic operations? These questions urgently require thoughtful and careful debate as matters of public policy. At the same time, in the critical context of budget cuts, certain actions already are being taken. State funding as a share of all public higher education funding has fallen, for example, from an average of 56.6 percent in 1988–89 to 50.5 percent in 1993–94 (El-Khawas, 1994). In turn, the share of costs that are supported directly by students has risen, often as a direct result of state legislative action.

Although state legislative leaders who responded to a 1993 survey rated "education programs" as most deserving of any additional state funds that might become available, it is not clear that support for institutions of postsecondary education was included in their use of the term "education." Four-fifths of the respondents reported that tuition increases had been substituted for increases in appropriations, and two-thirds thought it unlikely that public colleges and universities would receive funding increases in the 1994 legislative sessions (AASCU, 1994).

Preliminary data from the annual state appropriations survey conducted by the Center for Higher Education at Illinois State University show that 1994–95 appropriations for higher education operations increased to $42.8 billion, an inflation-adjusted increase of 2 percent over the 1992–93 figure. However, 21 states still reported inflation-adjusted decreases (*Chronicle*, 1994).

Institutional administrators, facing recent budget cuts, have taken steps that also may be setting new policy directions for higher education financing. This analysis reviews the main themes of institutional response, which have included a significant shift toward seeking new sources of revenue. Data from ACE's recent study, *Campus Trends, 1994*, are examined for the public sector according to four key strategies:

- Expenditure control,
- Seeking new sources of revenue,
- Reorganization, and
- Selective decisions about academic programs.

These different approaches cited by administrators emerged as distinctive themes in the *Campus Trends, 1994* study, based on analysis of about 50 possible actions taken since 1989. There may be several reasons why any of these actions are chosen, but the overall pattern — a majority of institutions taking these steps, or a combination thereof — represents a significant redirection of activity by public institutions of higher education.

The following section describes these recent institutional actions in some detail, giving attention to differences by type of institution. The broad trend is evident: Most public-sector institutions — two-thirds or more — have taken serious steps to redirect their operations during the last few years.

- The most widespread action has been to tighten expenditure controls through increased monitoring of expenses.
- Most also have taken steps to develop new sources of revenue.

TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS

Public institutions have been grouped by 1987 Carnegie classifications as follows:

Community Colleges: Two-year institutions that offer certificate or degree programs through the associate level.

Comprehensive Universities and Colleges: Institutions that offer the baccalaureate degree and, usually, master's degrees; more than half of their baccalaureate degrees are awarded in occupational or professional disciplines.

Doctorate-Granting Universities: Institutions that offer baccalaureate through doctorate degrees and that, during the 1980s, awarded fewer than 50 Ph.D. degrees each year and received less than $12.5 million annually in federal support for research and development.

Research Universities: Institutions that offer baccalaureate through doctorate degrees and that, during the 1980s, awarded at least 50 Ph.D. degrees each year and received more than $12.5 million annually in federal support for research and development.

For more information, see: *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987.

- Restructuring is underway, affecting both administrative and academic units at most public institutions.

- Many institutions are facing up to the need for "hard" decisions: setting priorities among academic programs, identifying certain programs for expansion while other academic programs are being cut back.

In short, these actions involve initial steps toward a substantial reassessment, and possibly a realignment, in how public higher education is financed and what programs it offers to its constituents.

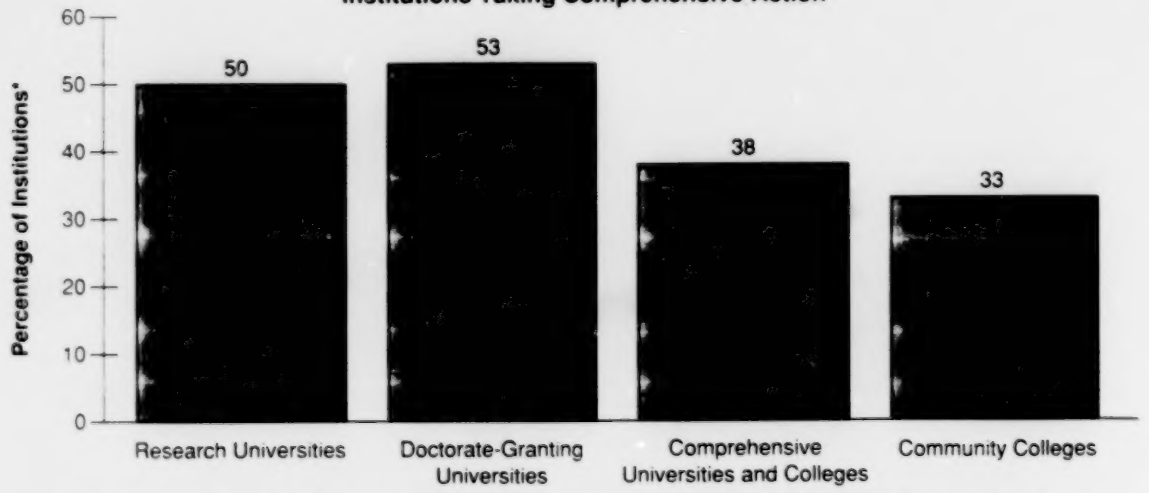
Many public institutions have taken comprehensive action, i.e., making changes that reflect all four strategies. Figure 1 shows that at least half of the doctoral-granting and research universities surveyed reported actions of all four types: tighter expenditure control, new fund raising, reorganization, and increased scrutiny of academic programs. Among community colleges, at least one-third have taken actions reflecting all four types of response. Among comprehensive universities and colleges, 38 percent reported actions that reflect all four strategies.

Differences in Approach by Type of Institution

Most public-sector institutions have adopted a mixed strategy for responding to their recent financial pressures. However, some distinctive themes emerge according to institutional type. Table 1 summarizes the survey's findings for four categories of public institutions. These differences

Figure 1

Institutions Taking Comprehensive Action



*Percentage of institutions that reported all four of the following actions: tighter monitoring of expenses; increased fund raising; administrative reorganization; and increased scrutiny of academic programs. These are the actions that were reported most frequently within each of the four response categories.

reflect several factors, including previous circumstances as well as the distinctive roles of and different opportunities available to each type of institution.

Community Colleges

Most community colleges have responded to recent financial pressures in ways similar to actions taken by other public institutions. Most made budget cuts and reorganized administrative and academic units. Compared to other types of institutions, however, several trends are distinctive.

One approach appears to be especially promising among community colleges: developing academic programs jointly with business. Seventy-three percent of community colleges reported taking this approach (Table 1), compared to much lower figures for four-year public institutions.

Areas that were *less often mentioned* by community colleges, compared to other public institutions, include:

- increasing fund raising;
- setting fees for student services; and
- reorganizing student services.

The relative lack of emphasis on making changes in student services may be due to the fact that, compared to residential institutions, community colleges offer a more limited scope of student services. Setting fees for those services also would be difficult in view of the financial profile of many community college students and the often sharp increases recently instituted in student charges per credit hour at many community colleges.

Table 1

Restructuring Actions at Public Institutions (in Percentages)*

Responding to Pressures By:	All Public Institutions	Community Colleges	Comprehensive Universities & Colleges	Doctorate-Granting Universities	Research Universities
Expenditure Control					
Tighten monitoring of expenditures	**81**	**83**	**75**	**86**	75
Cut some line items in the budget	75	75	**75**	67	73
Cut budgets of some units	65	63	65	81	**79**
Set new rules for budgeting	56	57	54	51	52
Cut budgets across the board	53	54	46	76	57
Defer maintenance, physical plant	48	49	41	56	58
Increase class size	47	43	52	70	50
New Sources of Revenue					
Increase fund raising	**74**	66	**89**	**93**	**89**
Increase reliance on tuition	71	70	72	81	76
Plan programs with business	60	**73**	33	39	43
Increase revenue-generating academic programs	51	53	45	51	56
Set fees for some student services	41	35	48	77	63
Introduce revenue-generating use of facilities	32	31	35	24	34
Reorganization					
Reorganize administrative units	**67**	**67**	**64**	72	**77**
Redesign administrative activity	57	62	44	53	57
Reorganize student services	54	52	53	**75**	67
Reorganize academic units	51	53	44	61	56
Changes in Academic Programs					
Increase scrutiny of programs	**72**	**71**	**71**	**86**	**73**
Review the mission of each unit	69	69	68	81	71
Introduce new programs	66	66	64	68	66
Increase the size of some programs	50	50	49	41	58
Cooperate with other institutions	49	49	53	48	40
Eliminate some programs	43	44	38	44	65
Reduce the size of some programs	32	31	28	34	67

***Highest response per category is in bold.**

Comprehensive Universities and Colleges

Compared to other institutions, comprehensive universities and colleges followed similar strategies in many respects. However, there are several areas in which they were *less likely* to report taking steps (Table 1). These include actions to:

- plan programs jointly with business;
- redesign administrative activity;
- reorganize academic units;
- eliminate academic programs;
- develop revenue-generating academic programs; and
- defer maintenance of the physical plant.

Comprehensive institutions reported the lowest level of activity on these responses, compared to other public institutions. Regarding the strategy of planning programs with business, for example, 33 percent of comprehensive institutions reported such actions, compared to 73 percent of community colleges, 43 percent of research universities, and 39 percent of doctorate-granting universities.

It should be noted that two of these strategies — planning programs with business and developing revenue-generating academic programs — require innovative actions; several others — for example, redesigning administrative activity, reorganizing academic units, and eliminating academic programs — involve making difficult decisions. Are there constraints facing comprehensive universities and colleges that hamper efforts of these kinds? Or, are these actions particularly unsuitable to the nature of these institutions?

Doctorate-Granting Universities

These universities, typically offering limited doctoral programs and receiving moderate levels of federal research funding, have adopted multiple strategies for addressing financial pressures. At the same time, they have given special attention to certain strategies (Table 1). Doctorate-granting institutions were *more likely* to report actions to:

- set fees for student services;
- reorganize student services;
- impose across-the-board budget cuts;
- increase class size;
- increase scrutiny of academic programs;
- review programs in light of the institution's mission; and
- increase fund raising.

This pattern of actions may suggest that doctorate-granting institutions are the most likely institutional type to impose restrictions or take necessary actions within a limited range of options. Increased scrutiny, along with mandated budget reductions, appear to have dominated their actions over the last few years.

Research Universities

Responses by research universities (Table 1) reflect a substantial degree of activity; relatively high percentages of research universities reported taking most of the actions listed.

Also striking is the fact that research universities were much *more likely* to report actions involving selective changes in academic programs. These include actions to:

- reduce the size of some academic programs;
- eliminate certain academic programs; and
- increase the size of some academic programs.

Institutional size may be a factor; larger universities, because they have a greater variety of programs, can make selective changes without damaging core programs. Smaller institutions would be less able to do so.

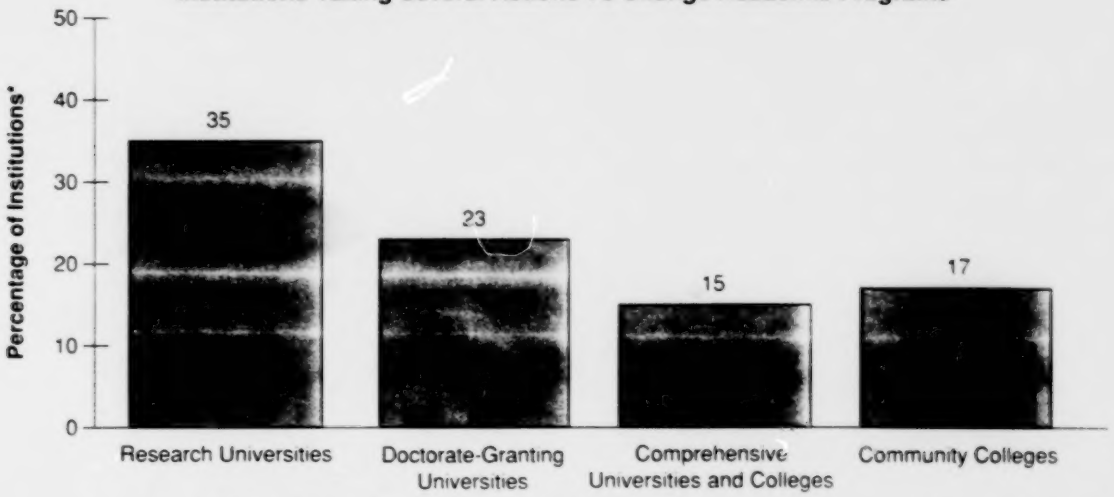
In fact, at least one-third of the research universities have taken serious steps to change their academic programs in the last few years. Figure 2 shows that 35 percent of research universities took all three of the following actions: giving closer scrutiny to academic programs; increasing the size of some programs; and reducing the size of some programs. This level of action on academic programs is considerably higher than the level of academic program activity among other institutional types.

Conclusion

This brief documents a substantial level of activity among public colleges and universities to redirect their operations and programs. This, in turn, suggests that many institutional administrators have become convinced that serious changes are necessary and that their current financial problems are neither temporary nor limited in impact. The actions reviewed here involve much more than budget cutting; they appear to be serious steps to redirect both the administrative and academic activity of many colleges and universities. Many institutions — fully half of both the

Figure 2

Institutions Taking Several Actions To Change Academic Programs



*Percentage of institutions reporting all three of the following actions: increase scrutiny of academic programs, increase the size of some programs, and reduce the size of other programs.

research and doctorate-granting universities and more than one-third of community colleges and comprehensive institutions — have adopted a relatively comprehensive approach, taking actions during the last few years that involved all four of the strategies reviewed in this analysis. The combined effects of such actions could well result in significantly different operating conditions for American colleges and universities.

In this context, policy makers at both the institutional and governmental levels may benefit from a review of the analyses and recommendations that emerged from several other periods of financial retrenchment for higher education. The Carnegie Council's 1975 report, *"More Than Survival,"* is pertinent for its extensive recommendations on institutional strategies for achieving financial flexibility and its analysis of ways that universal access to higher education could be achieved at a reduced or controlled level of public funding. Similarly, the analysis by Mortimer and Tierney (1979) of reallocation and retrenchment actions during the 1970s offers a thoughtful perspective on the merits and shortcomings of various alternatives. Other works from these earlier periods of financial constraint (e.g., Hyatt et. al, 1984; Cartter, 1975) also add perspective. They are a reminder that higher education often has faced severe financial constraints over the last few decades.

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Resources

- The **American Association of Community Colleges** counts among its members over 1,100 community, junior, and technical colleges. Its bi-weekly *Community, Technical and Junior College Times* carries news and commentary concerning this segment of the postsecondary education community. For further information, contact the American Association of Community Colleges, Suite 410, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 728-0200.

- The **American Association of State Colleges and Universities** (AASCU) together with the **National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges** (NASULGC) count among their membership rosters nearly all of the public four-year institutions in the country. AASCU's Office of Association Research and Information Resources (OARIR) publishes an annual *Report of the States* that provides data on enrollment and finances, as well as comments regarding current developments at public four-year institutions. OARIR from time to time conducts special surveys of association membership concerning other issues related to public higher education. For further information, contact the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Suite 700, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-7070.

- The **American Council on Education** (ACE) annually publishes *Campus Trends*, which reports the results of a survey of policies, practices, and the condition of the nation's institutions of higher education as perceived by their senior administrators. Conducted by Elaine El-Khawas, ACE's vice president for policy analysis and research, the *Campus Trends* studies have for several years included questions related to the reallocation of resources — financial, human, and programmatic. The surveys present the responses of between 350 and 400 institutions that are part of the Council's Higher Education Panel, an institutional sample that, for the purposes of these studies, represents all four-year colleges and universities and public two-year institutions.

  Although the survey's emphasis changes annually, a large proportion of the questions are essentially the same from year to year. A facsimile of the survey questionnaire is shown in each year's report so that identical or closely similar questions may be tracked over time. For further information, contact the Division of Policy Analysis and Research (DPAR), American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 939-9450.

- *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the national weekly newspaper devoted to higher education, offers both short news items and articles about institutional change in several of its sections, e.g., "Personal and Professional," "Information Technology," and "Business and Philanthropy." An annual index is published separately each August. The *Chronicle's* editorial offices are at 1255 Twenty-Third Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037, (202) 466-1000.

- The **National Association of College and University Business Officers'** (NACUBO) news magazine, *NACUBO Business Officer*, is a monthly publication that frequently includes articles describing examples of reorganization of administrative and financial activities on the campuses of various types of institutions. NACUBO also conducts a "benchmark" project that is designed to help institutions identify "best practices" in a large number of functional areas related to an institution's business and administrative activities, such as admissions, development, and purchasing. For further information, contact the National Association of College and University Business Officers, Suite 500, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 861-2500.

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